

Q & A

What is Meaningful Use?

Beginning in 2011, the Medicare and Medicaid EHR incentive programs will provide money to health care professionals and hospitals for adopting certified Electronic Health Records (EHRs); but only if the technology is being used in a “meaningful” way that supports the ultimate goals of improving quality, safety and efficiency of care.

These incentive programs are part of a federally funded stimulus plan designed to help eligible professionals and hospitals adopt and meaningfully use electronic health record technology. “Meaningful use” is defined in a very specific way for health care professionals and hospitals, and certain criteria must be met to receive payment.

Why Should I Care About Meaningful Use?

- Using an EHR can help you improve patient care—and the health of the community—by improving communication and giving you better information for decision-making.
- The timeframe is short and the sooner you act, the more money you can receive. Transitioning to an EHR and demonstrating meaningful use is a major undertaking. Now you can receive money to help offset the costs.
- The health care industry is going digital. To remain competitive and meet today’s standard of care, you need to be on the EHR track.
- Just having EHR technology isn’t enough to improve care. It’s all about how the technology is used in practice as a tool to transform health care service delivery and improve patient care.

Who is Eligible to Receive Payments?

- Eligible professionals for the Medicare incentive program are those with the title of MD, DO, DDS, DMD, DPM, OD, or DC.
- Eligible professionals for the Medicaid incentive program are those with the title of MD, DO, DDS, DMD, certified nurse-midwife, nurse practitioner, or physician assistant (if practicing in a physician assistant-led Federally Qualified Health Center or Rural Health Clinic).
- Eligible hospitals for the Medicare incentive program are subsection (d) hospitals and critical access hospitals.
- Eligible hospitals for the Medicaid incentive program are acute care (including critical access hospitals), and children’s hospitals.

Can I Participate in Both Medicaid and Medicare Incentive Programs?

Eligible professionals can choose to participate in either the Medicaid or the Medicare incentive program. They may not receive incentive program payments simultaneously from both programs. Hospitals may be eligible to participate in both incentive programs.

How Much Money Can I Receive?

Each eligible professional who demonstrates meaningful use of a certified EHR can receive up to \$44,000 over five years in the Medicare incentive program or up to \$63,750 over six years in the Medicaid incentive program. Payments begin as early as 2011.

Eligible professionals practicing in areas deemed as Health Professional Shortage Areas (HPSAs) who are participating in the Medicare incentive program are eligible for a 10% increase in the maximum payment amount (which means a maximum payment of \$48,400).

Eligible hospitals can receive a total of up to \$11 million over four years for the Medicare and Medicaid incentive programs combined. Payments begin as early as 2011.

What is the Difference Between the Medicaid and Medicare Incentive Programs?

Medicaid	Medicare
Voluntary for states to implement	Federal government will implement
Must begin incentive program by 2016. Program ends in 2021	Must begin incentive program by 2014. Must begin by 2012 to receive maximum payment. Program ends in 2016
No Medicaid payment reductions for eligible professionals and hospitals who do not demonstrate meaningful use	Medicare payment reductions begin in 2015 for eligible professionals and hospitals who do not demonstrate meaningful use
May receive payment for adoption/implementation/upgrading of certified EHR in the first year of participation. Must demonstrate meaningful use in subsequent years	To receive payment, must demonstrate meaningful use
Maximum payment for each eligible professional is \$63,750 over 6 years. Maximum hospital payment for both Medicaid and Medicare combined is \$11 million over four years	Max eligible professional payment is \$44,000 over 5 years. (\$48,400 if eligible for the HPSA bonus). Maximum hospital payment for both Medicaid and Medicare combined is \$11 million over four years
States can make adjustments to meaningful use criteria (based on common definition)	Meaningful use criteria will not vary by state
Medicaid managed care providers must meet regular eligibility requirements	Medicare Advantage physicians have special eligibility accommodations
Incentives can be paid for nonconsecutive participation (you can skip participation years) through 2021 for eligible professionals and 2015 for eligible hospitals	Incentive payments will only be paid for consecutive participation (you cannot skip participation years). Incentive amounts are linked to the participation year and decrease year by year

If I am Eligible, How Can I Demonstrate Meaningful Use to Qualify for Incentive Payments?

In the first two years of the incentive program, criteria for the meaningful use of a certified EHR fall into these general categories:

- Delivering care such as e-prescribing and CPOE (Computerized Physician Order Entry)
- Exchanging health information with other providers of care or business partners like labs or pharmacies
- Reporting clinical quality, public health and other measures

To receive incentive payments, you must meet all of the “core criteria” and a set number of additional criteria from the “menu set,” at least one of which must be a population health criteria.

How Can I Determine if the EHR Incentive Program is Right for Me?

If you can answer “yes” to these questions, the incentive program may be right for you.

1. Am I an eligible professional or hospital?
2. Do I have or plan to have an EHR?
3. Do I treat Medicare patients or Medicaid patients? (or if not, do I intend to?)

What Questions Do I Need to Consider if I Qualify?

If you are eligible for the incentive program, you have some decisions to make and information to gather.

1. Which incentive program will I pursue – Medicare or Medicaid?
2. Does it matter if I start in 2011 or can I wait?
3. What do I have to do to be ready?
4. What’s my strategy for meeting the criteria?

How Can Eligible Professionals Get Technical Assistance?

The Washington & Idaho Regional Extension Center (WIREC) is an organization that has been specially set up and funded to provide technical assistance, guidance and information to eligible health care professionals in Washington and Idaho. WIREC offers technical assistance services for eligible health care professionals to help them achieve meaningful use of EHRs. Go to www.wirecqh.org for more information. Fees for technical assistance vary.

More information for eligible professionals

Technical Assistance for Eligible Professionals:
www.wirecqh.org

Info and Assistance for Eligible Professionals:
Bob Perna, Washington State Medical Association, rjp@wsma.org

Incentive Calculator for Eligible Professionals:
www.himformatics.com/himss/final.htm

Info and Registration:
www.cms.gov/EHRIncentivePrograms

Info on Certified EHR Technology:
healthit.hhs.gov

More information for hospitals

Info and Assistance for Eligible Hospitals:
Jim Cannon, Washington State Hospital Association, jimc@wsma.org

Info and Registration:
www.cms.gov/EHRIncentivePrograms

Info on Certified EHR Technology:
healthit.hhs.gov

Incentive Calculator for Hospitals:
www.himss.org/EconomicStimulus/calculator/EcoStimulQuest.htm

